

Anton Wilhelm Ertl: “Austriana Regina Arabiae” –
Ein neulateinischer Habsburgroman des 17. Jahrhunderts.
Einführung mit Text und Übersetzung.

By Isabella Walser, Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2016. 443 pp.

Ádám Sebestyén

Humanism in East Central Europe Research Group, Institute of Hungarian Literature and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Eötvös Loránd University, Múzeum krt. 4/A, H-1088 Budapest, Hungary; akkon88@gmail.com

Isabella Walser’s book actually involved a twofold task: on the one hand, it contains the text edition and the German translation of *Austriana Regina Arabiae*, written by the Bavarian lawyer and geographer Anton Wilhelm Ertl (1654–c.1715). On the other, Walser contextualises Ertl’s work, classifying it as the first Neo-Latin Habsburg novel (p. 54). The story was inspired particularly by the second siege of Vienna and the defeat of the Ottoman army in 1683, which event had a relevant literary reception, too (for instance, the Christian victory was commemorated in sermons, pamphlets, plays, historiographical reports, epic poems, panegyrics and satirical poems). On the surface, *Austriana* can be interpreted as a classic love story, following the pattern of Heliodorus’s *Aethiopica*, although an allegorical interpretation reveals the novel’s political dimension. From a literary point of view, *Austriana* follows the conventions of the baroque court novel; however, Ertl does not forget to use the motifs of this type of novel as a tool, to represent his own political convictions.

The last part of Walser’s book, containing the proper text edition and translation, is preceded by several chapters which summarise the development of the Neo-Latin novel, the biography of Anton Wilhelm Ertl, and the motivic and structural aspects of the novel. The initial historical review of the genre focuses on the ancient Greek and Roman antecedents; however, Walser stresses that Egyptian fictional stories already used such characteristic motifs as apparent death, travel, exile, pirates, separation of the lovers or anagnorisis, which means the hero’s crucial recognition. Walser discerns two fundamental types of the genre. One of them is an idealised love story, while the other presents a “lower” worldview, similar to the ideological features of the picaresque novel (pp. 12–13). The following chapters continue this

historical overview throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, attributing an important role to the Neo-Latin novel (Walser examines *Momus* from 1450, written by Leon Battista Alberti and John Barclay's *Argenis* from 1621 as two influential examples of the early modern Neo-Latin novel). Walser claims that the theory of the Neo-Latin novel has not been studied in depth until recently (p. 32).

The second major part of the book is a thorough overview of the Habsburg novel, which is considered to be a particular subgroup of the Neo-Latin novel genre. This specific type of novel could be represented by six works, written over a relatively long period between 1687 and 1791. Besides Ertl's *Austriana*, which counts as the first Habsburg novel, the following works can be classified in the sub-genre: Ferenc Székely's *Aeneas Habsburgus* (1695), András Dugonics's *Argonauticorum* (1778) and three novels by József Keresztúry, published between 1790 and 1791 (*Josephus II. in campis Elysiis*, *Leopoldus II. in campo Rákos*, *Eleutherii Pannonii mirabilia fata*). According to Walser, these works share only the basic features of the Habsburg novel, such as the Latin language and the fact that the House of Habsburg plays a decisive role in the course of the story. On the other hand, regarding plot, form and style, the novels differ considerably. Székely's and Dugonics' novels represent a court-historical register, in contrast to Keresztúry's works, which are more satirical (pp. 54–55).

The third major part focuses on Ertl's *Austriana*. After a biographical summary, Walser epitomises the novel's content in the sections of chapter 3.2. The aforementioned motifs from ancient Greek love stories are obvious on the novel's narrative level. The lovers, Aurindus and Austriana, become separated from each other several times during the plot: they have to escape after being held captive by pirates and survive specific court intrigues; nevertheless they can enjoy their reunion at the end of the story (pp. 109–10). Besides these motifs, the narrative techniques, such as *in medias res* beginning, analeptic and proleptic figures, the cliff-hanger, as a narratological device, interpolated short stories, letters, adages, ethnographical discourses, monologues, dialogues and changes of narrative style also remind one of Heliodorus, and the well-marked structure of the ancient novel (pp. 113–14).

Chapter 3.4. explores the novel's allegorical level, revealing that the characters are states and political figures from the end of the seventeenth century. It is an important consideration, because Ertl's work contains a so-called "key" ("Clavis – Tabula Nominum Fictorum"), making it explicitly clear which contemporary rulers and statesmen appear in the *Austriana*. It becomes evident at first glance that the characters' relationships symbolise the political alliances that emerged after the Thirty Years' War. Austriana, as her name suggests, represents Leopold I and the House of Habsburg (p. 139). Similarly, Aurindus must be interpreted as an allegory of the states of the Holy Roman Empire. Based on the figures of the lovers, love must be envisaged as a political allegory, connecting the House of Habsburg and the German imperial

states: in this way Ertl propagates a vision of the supranational unity of the Habsburg Empire (p. 160). *Austriana* appears in the novel as the queen of Arabia. Her arch enemies are the rulers of Babylon, which exotic country symbolises the Kingdom of France (based on Ertl's "Clavis", the Babylonian queen, Altomira is Louis XIII of France and her niece, Tigrania is Louis XIV—pp. 247–48). The third great power represented in Ertl's book is India and its ruler, Torvan. On the allegorical level, India stands for the Ottoman Empire and Torvan represents the commander of the siege of Vienna, Grand vizier Kara Mustafa Pasha. Among the antagonists can be found Emeric Thököly, who appears as Agrames, leader of the pirates.

The author strongly argues that the quality of the alliances seems to be crucial during the whole book. The marriage between *Austriana* and Aurindus stresses a godly, dynastic relationship. On the other hand, Tigrania and Torvan's marriage of convenience is based exclusively on vindictiveness. Based on these examples, Walser interprets *Austriana* as a roman à clef. Besides the obvious analogies between the fictional and real characters and places, an attentive reading can discover further enigmatic figures, such as anagrams. For instance, Pholdurus is an anagram of Rudolphus and refers to Rudolph I, founder of the Habsburg dynasty (p. 150). Another anagram can be found in the name of Manardus, councillor of the Babylonian queen. The letters hide the first name Armandus, referring to Cardinal Richelieu's original name, Armand Jean du Plessis (p. 146).

Chapters 3.6 and 3.7 study the history of reception, stressing that the novel aims to create a supranational imperial identity, an intention which connects Ertl's work with Virgil's *Aeneid* (Walser collects some common content- and formal motifs, such as the novel's division into Odyssean and Iliadic halves—p. 217). Chapter 3.7 focuses on the vernacular translations. Ertl's novel was translated into Hungarian, too, and published in 1763 and 1808. It is interesting, that the *Austriana*'s poems are reshaped as folksongs in the first Hungarian adaptation from 1763. Furthermore, these inserted poems were published in a songbook in 1770 (p. 238).

Collectively, Walser's book could be useful especially for German scholarship, because the analysed Neo-Latin novels describe the Habsburg's and their adherents' efforts to represent a universal monarchy, not to mention that Ertl's work was published in a German translation. Besides, references such as Thököly's figure as an Ottoman retainer offer excellent supplements to an understanding of the Hungarian political situation during the second siege of Vienna in relation to the expectations of a Habsburg loyalist author, who hides his vision in allegorical allusions borrowed from ancient love stories.